

JUL 27 1965

PERS SCHLESINGER, THOUSAND DAYS
Soc 4-017
CIA 5-02.2

CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, July 26—A valid case of indecent exposure of what went on in the backrooms of the White House could be made against historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. for reporting that President Kennedy intended in 1963 to fire Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

This sort of case against Schlesinger can be made because politics, of necessity a somewhat dirty game, has a few time-honored rules. One is that persons privy to a President's off-hand comments, as Schlesinger was as a White House aid, have an obligation to respect such confidences.

This obligation holds true even after the death of the Chief Executive whom they served, if what was said reflects on any living political personage, especially one of the same "team."

This is the rule that Schlesinger has violated, and in an arrogant, ill-mannered way by throwing in his estimate of Rusk in an effort to explain why Kennedy decided he wanted a new Secretary of State if he won a second term in 1964.

Schlesinger's insulting and intellectually venomous appraisal of Rusk appeared in the current issue of Life magazine, as an excerpt from the former Harvard professor's forthcoming book "A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House."

The damage it will do to Rusk could be serious. Schlesinger must have been aware of this before his account of the Rusk-Kennedy relationship was published.

Did he intend making President Johnson's inherited Secretary of State even more ineffective and, in the process, take a veiled and vindictive jibe at Lyndon for retaining a man Kennedy had planned to let go?

Article Affects Rusk's Prestige

There is no argument that Rusk's usefulness as Secretary of State has been diminished by the Schlesinger article. Rusk's prestige in foreign capitals is hurt by the flat statement that Kennedy planned to get rid of him and put in his place "someone like Robert McNamara" who could take command and "make the department a



Arthur Schlesinger Jr.
His piece breaks the rules

vigorous partner in the enterprise of foreign relations."

At home and abroad Schlesinger's appraisal of Rusk carries an admitted sting. Although it displays spleen, it emphasizes the very characteristics of the Secretary of State that have long been questionable. These characteristics have been pounced on by those within the Johnson Administration, who have been working surreptitiously for some time to get rid of Rusk.

We refer to Schlesinger's clever word picture of Rusk as a man who, at White House conferences, "would sit calmly by, with his Buddha-like face and his half smile" and "rarely seemed to have strong views as to what should be done." And Schlesinger's impression that Rusk "lived under fear of inadequacy and humiliation" while at times "his colorless of mind appeared almost compulsive, his evenness of tone and temper purchased at inner cost."

It was for these and similar reasons, as Schlesinger figured it, that Kennedy reluctantly concluded that Rusk must go, and only after increased exasperation over the way State was run and the Secretary's failure to press any strong policy views.

But Bobby Isn't Talking

The hell of this "inside the White House" account of the Rusk-Kennedy relationship is that the one man who could put the entire affair into proper perspective lies in an Arlington grave. And his brother, Robert Kennedy, who next to him would know just where Schlesinger has exaggerated or misinterpreted the situation, is not offering either clarification or criticism.

In the good old days it was not considered ethical for a White House aid to tell all in public, once the President he served was dead or retired. This was good manners, if nothing more.

A President has a right to let his hair down once in a while, and should feel that what he blurts out in a moment of temper is not going to be interpreted to posterity as meaning that he really thinks Cabinet member X is a stupid oaf or a two-faced SOB.

This was sound, politically and ethically. We know all that is worth knowing about FLD's regime, about Truman's, Eisenhower's, even if we lack the juicy tidbits that their Presidential advisers could have supplied had they dared to take pen in hand.

But now it appears the nation and the world are going to be treated to every big and little, whimsical and cozy, highlight in the big-time political career of John F. Kennedy.

Do We Need the Old Rehash?

In the process—as the first accounts appear from Schlesinger and Kennedy confidant Ted Sorensen—various living persons are getting the knocks that used to be withheld until they were dead.

Aside from the assault on Rusk by Schlesinger, we can also get along without the rehashes and elaborations on the Bay of Pigs fiasco, especially since they cast new slurs on the way Allen Dulles operated as CIA chief.

And we dislike the recent Schlesinger effort to recite chapter and verse in an effort to show that Kennedy didn't really want Johnson as his 1960 running mate, nor did brother Bobby.

If true, the Kennedys were not the smart politicians they were supposed to be, because Nixon would have won in 1960 without Lyndon on the Democratic ticket.

There are some other books, besides Schlesinger's and Sorensen's, coming out soon that are supposed to give more inside-lowdown accounts of Kennedy's days in the White House. The authors or co-authors include Pierre Salinger, Lawrence O'Brien and Kenny O'Donnell.

Let's hope that they don't intentionally besmirch the living or inadvertently reflect on the dead simply for the sake of making a fast buck.